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HD **Why it may be best if Trump withdraws from the Paris climate deal**

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The world is urging the Trump administration to stay in the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Why? The reasons are manifold. Clean energy is the future. Withdrawing could be a disaster for U.S. economic and business interests, and global leadership. The world needs momentum and serious action to deal with this catastrophic problem. The Paris Agreement is a good deal for the United States.

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All of these reasons are right, but in some ways beside the point. The calls for the United States to remain in the Paris Agreement are fundamentally pleas urging the U.S. to act responsibly and pro-actively on climate change, more than they are about the Paris Agreement itself.

It is undoubtedly true that it would be best for the United States and the world if the country stayed in the Paris Agreement, and acted responsibly on climate change.

Unfortunately, this is not the reality we live in.

The Trump administration is openly hostile to action on climate change. In rhetoric, executive order and administrative action, the Trump administration has sought to undermine climate action, obscure knowledge about the problem and even obstruct research on its nature and solutions. So we are in the realm of terrible choices.

Either an openly hostile United States stays in the agreement or an openly hostile United States withdraws. It is an open question which of these bad options is worse for action on climate change.

U.S. President Donald Trump's decision may matter little to the functioning of the Paris Agreement. The nature of the agreement is such that each country decides its own commitments, so it is insulated, to some extent, from the recalcitrance or absence of any one party. The United States is certainly no ordinary party and has been a linchpin for the success of the multilateral climate regime for the past 30 years. However, the loss of U.S. leadership and the damage from that loss is already being felt because of the Trump administration's actions, regardless of the ultimate decision on Paris. Withdrawing would be a symptom of the administration's hostility on climate change, but the problem is that underlying hostility and disruptive proclivity.

If the United States remains at the table, negotiations in the years to come could be significantly more contentious. The mandated discussions of ratcheting up countries' commitments will be complicated if the Trump administration brashly waters down U.S. commitments. The delicate North-South bargain at the heart of the agreement might not survive the Trump administration arrogantly dismissing Paris as a bad deal while simultaneously backing off from previous climate funding pledges for the Global South.

Withdrawing would certainly be bad for the United States on almost all counts. It would sustain a reputational hit, suffer international backlash and isolation, leave a leadership vacuum for China to fill and lose out on the potential economic opportunities arising from participating in global action on climate change. Withdrawal would also be extremely messy (taking up to three years) and inject significant uncertainty into the global response to climate change. Ironically, though, it might not be as bad for the overall global response to climate change if withdrawal strengthened international resolve to act on climate change – an isolated United States is less likely to catalyze a general move away from aggressive climate action.

There is no evidence yet that the Trump administration can be convinced to act responsibly on climate change or that remaining in the Paris Agreement will convince Mr. Trump to change course. The question is whether a U.S. withdrawal is less bad for the global response to climate change. The negative effects of Mr. Trump's action on climate are already being felt, domestically and internationally, so withdrawing won't necessarily make things worse than they already are. Further, withdrawing will entail political costs for the Trump administration and may limit the damage the United States can do from within the climate negotiations. It would also shatter any remaining illusions that this administration intends to act responsibly on climate, thus providing a further catalyst for activism and climate action by other actors and means.

At the 2007 United Nations climate negotiations in Bali, the representative from Papua New Guinea famously called on an obstinate United States to "lead or get out of the way." Climate leadership appears to be off the table, replaced by steadfast determination to disrupt climate action. Until there is any sign that this could change, it may be prudent to urge Mr. Trump to get out of the way.

U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement would be a terrible day for the global response to climate change – but, as much as it pains me to say so, it is possible that a decision to stay might be worse.

NS gclimt : Climate Change | gcat : Political/General News | genv : Natural Environment | gglobe : Global/World Issues

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